

United States Senate
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July 30, 2021

The Honorable Randy Moore
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Chief Moore:

Congratulations on your recent appointment to serve as the 20th chief of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). I look forward to working with you in your new position. As you begin your new role, I write to highlight my concerns with the current state of the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) timber sale program.

As you know, the BHNF consists of more than 1.2 million acres spanning western South Dakota to northeastern Wyoming, and it has been nationally recognized as an example of how proactive forest management can help reduce impacts from mountain pine beetles and wildfires. This national forest provides recreation opportunities, supports wildlife, and contributes significantly to the local and regional economy.

The forest products industry in the Black Hills depends on the BHNF for approximately 80 percent of its raw material, and any reductions below the current fiscal year (FY) target will have direct and profoundly negative impacts on the health of the forest and the sustainability of local communities.

Earlier this year, a sawmill in Hill City, South Dakota, that employed approximately 150 people, closed its doors amid an all-time record lumber market due to a lack of timber coming off the BHNF. Hill City has a population of approximately 1,000 people, and other towns that depend on local sawmills have even smaller populations. I am concerned that additional sawmill closures may be imminent and about the tremendous impact this would have on local communities.

In October 2020, after nearly seven months of analyzing USFS and other data, the BHNF Advisory Board – one of two boards in the nation approved to provide formal advice and recommendations to the USFS – provided a formal recommendation to not reduce the timber sale program below the Allowable Sale Quantity of 181,000 ccf sawtimber and identified potential additional timber resources to increase the timber sale program.

The BHNF timber sale program plays a critical role in maintaining the health of the forest and supporting the local forest products industry. This is why I am deeply concerned about the USFS's failure to meet timber harvest targets in recent years as well as about discussions of reductions to harvest levels in future years. With these concerns in mind, I request responses to the following questions:

- How will the USFS incorporate the recommendations from the BHNF Advisory Board into determining timber sale targets?
- Does the USFS expect to meet its FY 2021 harvest target of 175,000 ccf?
- What actions has the USFS taken to meet the FY 2021 harvest target, and what actions will be taken to meet future targets?
- How does the USFS plan to immediately begin working with states and forest products stakeholders on issues relating to forest management activities, including the timber sale program, among others?
- How will the USFS accomplish a timber sale program in upcoming years that avoids negative impacts to the forest and local communities?

In addition to timely written responses to these questions, I request that the USFS brief my staff on these important issues as soon as practicable. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter, and I look forward to working with you to proactively manage the BHNF and to implement a robust timber sale program that maintains the health of the forest and supports the communities that depend on it.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
United States Senator